

## INTERPAKS-An Attempt to Aid Agricultural Communications Around the World

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## INTERPAKS-An Attempt to Aid Agricultural Communications Around the World

### Abstract

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# **INTERPAKS - An Attempt to Aid Agricultural Communications Around the World**

**Jim Evans**

Like many programs, the International Program for Agricultural Knowledge Systems (INTERPAKS) germinated in the high-acid soil of need and frustration. It was fertilized by Title XII, through Strengthening Grants. And it happened to fit a growing season of professional friendships within our campus.

Two things happened during 1979 and early 1980 that gave life to the idea that became INTERPAKS. One was the Title XII program, which stirred up and revealed considerable international activity and interest within several related disciplines on our campus: agricultural education, agricultural communications, extension education, library and information science, and rural sociology. Each of these units has something going, and some ideas. Title XII helped them see each other.

The other development was the formation in 1979 of an International Extension Committee. It was charged, initially, to serve as an advisory group for a specific international extension research project. In addition, however, administrators suggested that the committee should explore how the university might develop a "programmatic thrust in the general area of extension and related fields."

Ray Woodis and I represented our agricultural communications unit on the International Extension Committee. Also, our office was getting some Title XII support for the International

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Program for Agricultural Communications Education, through which we work with universities that want to develop degree programs to prepare professional agricultural communicators.

I believe that all of us, through our experiences, were uneasy with the fragmented responses of our campus to the human aspects of agricultural development abroad. When the agricultural communicator is involved, outcomes often have a "mass-media look." The agricultural educator, in turn, tends to think in terms of school systems; the extension educator in terms of informal, face-to-face approaches; the library specialist in terms of libraries; and so on.

We liked the idea of maintaining specialized expertise. But we felt uneasy about the tendency to work only within our disciplines, without drawing upon the wealth of related expertise on our campus.

The vision of a collaborative approach took shape during late 1980. We used the committee to think about how we might organize to cooperate in international programs across our five disciplines related to rural information and education. The next year and a half brought some stimulating sessions. Is there a central core of academic interest across these disciplines? If so, what is it? What kind of title can we use to put an umbrella over us? How can we organize ourselves? Where would an organization fit within the university structure? How would it be funded? What would be the scope and limits of its interests?

By the end of the thinking process, we were working with a group of interested faculty representing six fields of study: library and information science, agricultural communications, rural sociology, extension administration and education, agricultural education, and agricultural economics. They represented five academic units within three different colleges. Faculty members were assisted in their planning by three senior-level consultants from the Urbana-Champaign campus and one external consultant.

In addition to the six primary fields of study, connections were also identified with fields and programs such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, Women in Development, African Studies Program, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and Center for Asian Studies.

In 1982, INTERPAKS was established formally as an educational, non-profit program of the University of Illinois. It is headed by J.B. Claar, former director of the Illinois

Cooperative Extension Service and Associate Dean of the College of Agriculture.

Two categories of faculty are associated with the program: core staff and program faculty. Core staff include those who have part or all of their salary lines administered by INTERPAKS. Program faculty members are involved in the various activities of the program, such as consulting on specific short-term projects or conducting research, but they do not have a continuing administrative association with INTERPAKS.

The program is administered by the College of Agriculture, under the Office of International Agriculture. This arrangement is based on letters of agreement among the various colleges and departments involved.

The University provides some core funding (faculty time and administrative support). However, most of the long-term support will need to come from external sources through grants, technical assistance projects, teaching services, research projects, and other services.

The stated goal of INTERPAKS is to "support agricultural development through more effective application of technology and related information and increased competence of the individuals involved by improving educational systems and processes, in cooperation with national and international organizations."

We like the potentials of INTERPAKS for several reasons.

- It spans the entire continuum by which agricultural information is gathered, processed, stored, retrieved, disseminated, interpreted, and used.
- It includes both the formal and nonformal settings for communicating.
- It deals with information and education for persons of both sexes and of all ages.
- It covers the entire range of settings, from individuals to large institutions.
- It encompasses mass and personal methods of communicating, from the latest high-technology media to the most traditional ways in which people interact.
- It emphasizes the clientele dimensions of the information processes, not only those dimensions connected with content and methods.
- It considers the learner not only in an individual sense, but also in a social and cultural context.
- It represents the important systems through which agricultural information often moves in societies: families,

neighborhoods, schools, extension services, public media, libraries, and others.

- It involves university faculty members who have broad and varied international experience.
- It provides a structure through which we can respond when we get inquiries that cut across several disciplines.

## **Kinds of Activities**

INTERPAKS will concentrate on four kinds of programs and activities.

1. Technical assistance for the transfer and use of agricultural information. Examples might include collaborative efforts to improve extension services, public media, linkages with research organizations, agriculture programs in schools, libraries, information services of rural organizations, and others.
2. Teaching programs and services related to agricultural information and education. Such programs might involve teaching that is formal or informal, long-term or short-term. It may relate to teaching U.S. residents or those elsewhere.
3. Special studies and research. INTERPAKS may plan and conduct special studies in cooperation with international agencies and national programs as a basis for helping improve agricultural knowledge systems. These studies may involve analysis at any stage of evaluation: formative, process, or summative. They may vary widely in size, purpose, approach, and location.
4. Dissemination and networking functions. As INTERPAKS conducts studies, carries out technical assistance, conducts teaching programs and so on, it gains a special capability for disseminating information about agricultural knowledge systems. Newsletters, research reports, and bibliographies are examples of ways in which these functions might be carried out.

## **Activities in Progress**

Following are some of the current activities of INTERPAKS, arranged within the four categories.

### *Technical assistance*

- a. Several members of the INTERPAKS teams are involved with Phase 2 of the Caribbean Agricultural Extension Program,

which seeks to improve the economic and social well-being of small farm households in the Eastern Caribbean and Belize by increasing the effectiveness of national extension systems. The program will also raise the capacity of the Department of Agricultural Extension at the University of the West Indies. This is a collaborative effort of the University of the West Indies and the Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities (MUCIA) under funding of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Ray Woodis of our staff is on 2-year assignment with the Caribbean Agricultural Extension Program. He is assigned to the Department of Agricultural Extension at the University of the West Indies, Trinidad, to help organize an agricultural communications and outreach program for the Faculty of Agriculture.

b. The International Program for Agricultural Communications Education (PACE) involves working with universities that wish to establish or strengthen courses and curricula in agricultural communications. PACE addresses a widespread problem: the shortage of qualified professional communicators in agriculture. And the philosophy of PACE is that the most promising long-run approach lies with in-country, degree-based programs of study in agricultural communications.

During the past 3 years, we have worked with universities in Indonesia, Philippines, Pakistan and the West Indies to help assess needs and plan programs. The first (Bogor Agricultural University) recently admitted its first rural communication majors.

c. INTERPAKS will have a major role in the extension-related portions of a project being undertaken to strengthen the Agricultural University in Peshawar, Pakistan. Funding is from the U.S. Agency for International Development. One large component deals with agricultural extension, continuing education, instructional resources, communications services, courses and curricula in agricultural communications, among other topics.

The design phase of this project was completed last fall in Peshawar, and five members of the INTERPAKS committee took part.

d. Consulting activities are being carried out by individual members of INTERPAKS. For example, within the past year specific members have assisted with an evaluation of extension in Sierra Leone and with the design of a comprehensive study of agricultural education institutions in Africa. Next

month, one INTERPAKS faculty member will present a concept paper at a USAID-sponsored conference about agricultural education in Africa.

### *Teaching*

a. During the spring of 1982, we set up an academic subcommittee to determine what kind of on-campus, instructional program INTERPAKS needs in order to serve domestic students and those from abroad. That is: What should be the goals of an academic, formal program of instruction in this multidisciplinary area? What relevant courses exist now? What new courses, if any, should be conceived? What are the merits of a core curriculum, with optional specializations?

Here are some of the recommendations of that subcommittee:

- Something new is needed on our campus at the graduate level. But the new can be chiefly a matter of emphasis and better use of what now exists among the current degree programs in cooperating disciplines.
- A one-unit required core course, team-taught for interdisciplinary input, should be established to acquaint students with the systems approach to the development, dissemination and feedback of agricultural information.
- All attention and efforts should initially be concentrated on a suitable Master's degree opportunity for entering graduate students, using existing degree titles in the cooperating disciplines but adding a flexible component of course work that maximizes attention to agricultural knowledge systems.
- Need for informal instruction should be met on an ad hoc, made-to-order basis.

b. During late March and early April, Gary Beaumont of the agricultural communications unit conducted two workshops at the University of the West Indies for extension personnel from seven Caribbean countries.

c. Three members of the INTERPAKS committee, including Del Dahl of agricultural communications, conducted 1-week workshops in Zambia during late March and early April. Organized by INTERPAKS, the workshops covered principles of effective extension work and appropriate instructional techniques. Participants were provincial and national extension officers, university faculty members, and others.

d. INTERPAKS will offer a new 5-week short course for senior extension administrators this fall. The course, "Organization and Operation of Agricultural Extension Services in the International Setting," will be taught on our cam-



pus by senior, internationally experienced faculty members. The Office of International Training, U.S. Department of Agriculture, is coordinating enrollment. Subject matter will include: historical development and recent trends in extension; setting up an effective extension organization; and managing an extension service. This short course will emphasize practical matters, including field trips and case studies.

#### *Special studies and research*

The first research project of INTERPAKS is concerned with finding more effective ways to transfer improved agricultural technology to small farmers in developing countries. The 5-year, \$1.7 million project is being funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. It began March 1.

The first objective of this project is to develop a conceptual model of the development and transfer of agricultural technology, using an operational systems analysis. The model will then be tested and refined by evaluating it against successes and failures found in an examination of selected case studies of real-world systems. Case studies will be carried out by study teams in approximately 16 developing countries. The teams will look at a wide range of technology related to basic food crops, major staples, cash or export crops, and special commodities.

The analytic case studies will be published as monographs and will investigate different ways of organizing agricultural systems for the development, transfer, and use of technology. In addition, the INTERPAKS faculty will assist USAID missions in many of these countries to design more effective technical assistance projects to increase agricultural production.

As far as timing is concerned, the first 3 years will be taken up with research and data collection. Year four will be directed to compiling the report and sponsoring a major international conference. The fifth year will be devoted to workshops and seminars for policy makers and directors of national programs, plus efforts to translate the findings into teaching materials that universities and others can use. Results should be of interest to any communicator who is involved in agricultural development.

#### *Dissemination and networking functions*

a. A newsletter, entitled *Interpaks Interchange*, was introduced during November, 1983. The purpose of this newsletter is to share useful information with leaders of agricultural

knowledge transfer systems in other countries. Content of the early issues have included reports of research, new publications, seminar presentations, helpful ideas, activities of INTERPAKS and other organizations, among other information.

It is available without charge to persons who have an international interest in agricultural knowledge systems.

b. INTERPAKS has introduced a special series of international agricultural publications, the first of which was published last year. It was entitled *The Cooperative Extension Service: An Adaptable Model for Developing Countries*. Others are in process.

c. In connection with the research project mentioned earlier, INTERPAKS has begun to compile an international literature base related to agricultural knowledge systems. A new bibliographer-librarian is compiling an extensive bibliography-acquisition list of books, papers, and unpublished documents for collection and review as part of the research project mentioned earlier. These materials will be processed for computer-based access by INTERPAKS faculty members as well as other research groups, national programs, and donor agencies.

Annotated bibliographies will also be printed for individuals and institutions that do not have the necessary computer equipment for direct access.

We welcome published and unpublished reports, papers, and other documents that relate to technology development and transfer in agriculture. Institutions that cooperate with INTERPAKS in this way will automatically be added to the mailing list for bibliographic information and the newsletter.

d. Closely related to the broad literature base of INTERPAKS is a newly forming Agricultural Communications Documentation Center. You may have seen in ACE Quarterly a report of research that showed the wide scatter of agricultural communications literature. Through a later survey, we learned that teachers, researchers, and practitioners are interested in getting access to such literature. So, with help from Title XII Strengthening Grant funds and other sources, we are now forming a documentation center. That is, we are collecting the actual documents, then indexing them for computer-based data management that will permit a user to search not only by author, title, and so on, but also by topic. We are collecting documents now and entering the first ones into this new system. Our goal is to have about 1,000 documents into the system by the end of the year.

e. A year ago, the Food and Agriculture Organization selected INTERPAKS to prepare a Second Edition of the widely-used FAO publication, *Agricultural Extension—A Reference Manual*, which was first published in 1975. Authors of different chapters are from INTERPAKS, from outside institutions and from Third World countries.

All chapters were sent to Rome by February 1 for editing. Publication is planned for later this year.

## Looking Ahead

INTERPAKS has made some encouraging progress during its first 2 years, and mainly with resources from within our own faculty and campus. The commitment of faculty members is impressive to me. I believe that much of the commitment comes from a belief that we who work in the rural behavioral sciences must break some barriers that separate disciplines. Those of us involved in INTERPAKS have decided that, as a way of doing business, we cannot tackle international problems and opportunities by individual discipline.

INTERPAKS is providing a valuable foundation for teamwork across lines that were seldom crossed before. It also is providing a helpful mechanism for considering possible international projects that come to our attention. Through INTERPAKS, we can get together to discuss priorities, resources, approaches and so on. It holds great promise, in that regard.

All of us recognize that INTERPAKS remains untested. Using the analogy that I applied earlier, we could say that INTERPAKS has hardly sprouted. It has yet to face the elements of nature: the drouths and floods, winds, pests and blazing sun. It's hardly out of the ground. But it shows life.